DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 211 IR 050 948

AUTHOR Eckert, Sharon Stine
TITLE The Pluralism of Rural: A Survey of Reference Service in Iowa Public Libraries Serving a Population of Less Than 2,500.
PUB DATE Jul 84
NOTE 91p.; Certificate of Advanced Study Project Report, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Library Personnel; Library Surveys; *Participant Characteristics; *Public Libraries; *Reference Services; *Rural Areas; Staff Utilization; Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS *Iowa

ABSTRACT

A survey of 200 Iowa rural public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 was conducted in 1984 to determine reference service characteristics. A total of 137 libraries responded to a survey modeled after a questionnaire developed by Bernard Vavrek for a 1981 nationwide survey. It was found that the number of full-time staff members was less than one-half the number of volunteers, and less than one-fourth the number of part-time staff members. The highest level of training achieved by 50% of all staff members reported was a high school diploma. The data showed that hours of service and annual budget increased proportionately to an increase in population served. Less than half of the libraries reportedly kept records on the total number of questions asked. It was found that a weekly average of 68.96 questions were made up of 64.1% reference questions and 35.9% directional. The subject categories of questions reported as most frequently asked did not correspond to those categories reported as most difficult to answer. Respondents indicated that additional reference materials, additional reference training, and additional hours of service would contribute most to improving reference service. A sample questionnaire, glossary, 32 tables containing cross analyses of data collected, and a 66-item bibliography are provided. (Author/THC)

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THE PLURALISM OF RURAL: A SURVEY OF REFERENCE SERVICE IN IOWA PUBLIC LIBRARIES SERVING A POPULATION OF LESS THAN 2,500

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JULY 1984

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ABSTRACT

A survey of 200 Iowa rural public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 was conducted in 1984 to determine reference service characteristics. The survey questionnaire was modeled after the questionnaire developed by Bernard Vavrek for a 1981 nationwide survey of rural public libraries. A total of 137 libraries responded to the survey. It was found that the number of full-time staff members was less than one-half the number of volunteers and less than one-fourth the number of part-time staff members. The highest level of training achieved by 50% of all staff members reported was a high school diploma. The data showed that hours of service and annual budget increased proportionately to an increase in population served. Less than half of the libraries reportedly kept records on the total number of questions asked. It was found that a weekly average of 68.96 questions asked included 64.1% reference questions and 35.9% directional. The subject categories of questions reported as most frequently asked did not correspond to those categories reported as most difficult to answer. Respondents indicated that additional reference materials, additional reference training, and additional hours of service would most contribute to improving reference service. Some of the findings of this study are compared to those reported by Bernard Vavrek from the 1981 nationwide survey. A sample questionnaire, glossary, 32 tables containing cross analysis of data collected, and a 66 item bibliography are provided.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge support for this study from the Ernest Reece Fund for Library Research and from a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Graduate College SEAL Grant.

I also wish to express my gratitude to my project advisor, Terry L. Weech, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for his assistance, guidance, and encouragement throughout the study.

Special thanks are also expressed to my other committee members, Kathryn Luther Henderson, Associate Professor and Walter C. Allen, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and to Bernard Vavrek, Professor, Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, Clarion State College, Clarion, Pennsylvania, who provided the model for this study.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Concepts

The concept of "rural librarianship" is as elusive as the concept of "rural"--not so much, perhaps, in the minds of those who administer, staff and patronize rural public libraries and those who inhabit, sustain and actualize "rural"--but certainly in the minds of others who must conceptualize from conjecture and from the limited amount of research conducted by those few proponents whose concern and curiosity have been piqued.

Traditional connotations of geographic isolation, economic depression, and cultural deprivation have been challenged by the recent migration of those who are, by preference, selecting rural habitation for an idealized family, community, and environmental quality-of-life. Some sociologists theorize that the recent trend of urban immigration to rural areas may contribute to economic growth and, in addition, provide increased support for previously unavailable or inadequate services.[1] The continuing lack of economic vitality in many rural areas contradicts any presupposed universality of this theory. A recent study of North Central Region rural counties with net immigration rates of 10% or higher, however, indicated that both residents and immigrants strongly favored

future growth and development in their communities.[2]

The phenomenon of "rural" is not its development or its distinction, but, as Thomas R. Ford suggests, its persistence--its persistence of "ordered patterns of social and economic behavior, values, beliefs, and attitudes associated with community size"--despite societal changes and influences.[3]

An awareness and understanding of this persistence is requisite in attempting to conceptualize rural librarianship, actual or potential. If a community's population base sustains little or no increase over an extended period of time (decades, perhaps); if a community's primary source of support for library service is local taxation; and if a community's resultant library budget is $2,000 per year or less (subject, of course, to endowments or other gifts), is it probable or plausible that a metamorphosis of library service might occur this year--or next? Can "adequate" rural library service be defined or measured by state and national standards that conceptualize "adequate" attainable levels of service for much larger libraries? Is it possible that rural librarians and rural residents might be in the most strategic position to determine realistic levels and characteristics of desirable services in their unique community, simply because they <u>are</u> its strengths, its determinants, its persistence, and its potential?

An awareness of the ordered patterns of rural persistence cannot be conjured from a single image. Rural, so comprehensive and yet so imprecise, is synonymous with neither farms nor

weekend homes; with neither open spaces nor small places.[4]

The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a "rural" population as those persons living in places of less than 2,500 inhabitants.[5] That definition is adopted for the purpose of this study.

Inhabitants of rural areas comprise 26.3% of the U.S. population.[6] Only 9.7% of the rural population (or 2.6% of the total U.S. population), however, live on farms.[7] The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a "farm" as all land on which agricultural operations were conducted under the day-to-day control of an individual management and from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were or could be sold during the census year.[8] The ordered patterns of rural persistence must be derived, therefore, from the diversities--the pluralism--within the rural sector itself.[9]

The rural sector of librarianship has long withstood a conspicuous omission in library research literature until very recently. The profession's focus on urban/metropolitan and academic/research libraries and its preoccupation with technology have overshadowed most inquisition or concern for rural libraries. The Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion State College in Pennsylvania; the Rural Library Services Committee of the Small and Medium-Sized Libraries Section of the Public Library Association; and publications such as Rural Libraries and the Rural Library Service Newsletter represent some of the recent laudable efforts to create a cognizance of the challenges indigenous to rural librarianship.

The author's interest in studying rural libraries stems from experiencing rural life--more specifically, rural life in Iowa--as a native, family-farm resident and a rural library patron for more than 20 years. Iowa sustains characteristics particularly unique for the investigation of rural librarianship. The following background information is provided to support that view.

Background

Inhabitants of rural areas comprise 41.4% of Iowa's total population.[10] Thirteen other states have a higher percentage of rural population; Vermont has the highest with 66.2%.[11] Most of Iowa's rural inhabitants (84.4%) were born in Iowa.[12]

The majority of Iowa's 955 cities (86.9%) have a population of less than 2,500 (range = 10 - 2,450), and only 1.8% of Iowa's cities have a population of more than 25,000.[13]

Iowa ties for second (with Missouri) for having the highest number of farms in the U.S. (Texas ranks first).[14] Iowa is categorically a "rural" state.

As reported in the Statistics of Public Libraries 1977-1978, 5,502 (65.1%) of the 8,456 U.S. public libraries serve a population of less than 10,000.[15] Statistics for libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 were not available. In Iowa, 390 of the 511 public libraries (76.3%) serve a population of less than 2,500.[16]

Although it is recognized that a public library's service area may extend beyond the actual political entity of a city,

for the purpose of this study, the following definition in Library Data Collection Handbook was adopted:

> Public Library Primary Service Area: The geographic area, and the residents thereof, for which the library has been established to offer services and from which (or on behalf of which) the library derives income. Typically, this area would correspond to that from which the library derives its legal identity.[17]

If 390 Iowa public libraries serve a population of less than 2,500 and 830 Iowa cities have a population of less than 2,500, it can be said, then, that 47% of Iowa cities with a population of less than 2,500 have their own public libraries.

According to the State Library of Iowa, Iowa rural residents served by contract (not within municipal boundaries) or residents within a municipal boundary but without a municipal public library comprise 28.1% of the total population. (Specific contracting agencies were not identified).[18] These percentages (47% and 28.1%) cannot be directly compared, however, because the former is based on the percentage of municipalities that serve a specific population (less than 2,500) that have their own libraries; the latter is based on the percentage of total population that are without a municipal library or that contract for library services.

It is not the intent of this report to belabor the history of Iowa public library development. Interested readers are referred to a 1968 publication by Kenneth R. Pease, "Iowa Public Library Service in Recent History."[19] A brief summary of pertinent events leading to the development of the current organizational structure, however, may be helpful in interpreting the findings of the study.

Nearly thirty years ago (1955), 38.3% of Iowa's population did not have "direct" library service.[20] In 1956, in response to the qualifying funding requirements of the Federal Library Services Act, a new state law (Code of Iowa Section 303) was written to extend library services from "established" libraries so that all Iowa residents could have equal library service opportunities.[21] A five year plan provided guidelines for the establishment of a "federation" of existing libraries in seven major geographic regions which were to contract out to "unserved" areas of less than 10,000 population such services as reference service, interlibrary loan, centralized purchasing, etc.[22] Another key element of the plan was the state's offer to give $200-400 worth of reference materials to those libraries that served a population of less than 10,000 that met certain required standards.[23] With the incentive of free reference materials, 203 of the approximately 305 public libraries serving a population of less than 10,000 met the minimum standards by 1962.[24]

In 1964, in compliance with the Federal Library Services and Construction Act, the state adopted plans to designate existing, qualifying public libraries to serve as autonomous Cooperative System Library Centers with which participating, qualifying public libraries could contract for services similar to those outlined in 1956.[25]

From that structural background, the current Iowa Regional Library System was created in 1973 (Code of Iowa Chapter 303B). State appropriated funds support the seven

autonomous regional units charged with providing supportive library services to public libraries.[26] According to the State Library of Iowa, citing ALA's Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, Sixth Edition, 1983 Survey Project Report, Iowa is one of only six states that does not provide direct state aid to its public libraries.[27]

Iowa (with Nevada and South Dakota) ranks as one of the three most literate states in the U.S.[28] From 1920 to 1960, Iowa singularly maintained the highest literacy rate in the U.S.[29]

The above information is provided to support the author's view that the aggregate rural, population, public library, and literacy characteristics of Iowa constitute a unique environment for the investigation of rural librarianship.

CHAPTER II

SCOPE, PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to survey the characteristics and patterns of reference service in Iowa rural public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500. It was hypothesized that economic constraints traditionally indigenous to libraries serving this population range would be reflected in the findings of the study.

For the purpose of this study, the 1983 ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science definition of "reference service" (synonymous with "information service") was adopted:

> Personal assistance provided by members of the reference staff to library users in pursuit of information.[30]

In 1981, Bernard Vavrek, Professor, Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, School of Library Science, Clarion State College, Clarion, Pennsylvania, conducted a national survey of reference services in the approximately 6,797 U.S. public libraries serving a population of 25,000 or fewer individuals.[31] (That study will be referred to as the "Vavrek study" throughout this report). Although Vavrek defined "rural" as communities with a population of 25,000 or less, he identified a subset sample of 234 libraries that met the U.S. Bureau of the Census definition (areas with less than 2,500 population).[32] The reported findings of that subset sample from the Vavrek study provided data that could be

compared to the results of future studies of libraries serving that population range.

The secondary purpose of this study, therefore, was to compare the findings produced from this study of public libraries in a single rural state (Iowa) to those findings produced from an earlier nationwide survey of libraries serving the same population ranges.

According to the 1981-1982 Iowa Public Library Statistics, Iowa's 511 public libraries (based on the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980 population) serve the following population ranges:[33]

TABLE 1

Iowa Public Libraries Identified By Population Served

Population Served	Number of Libraries	Percentage of Libraries
0-499	111	21.7%
500-999	138	27.0%
1,000-2,499	141	27.6%
2,500-4,999	52	10.2%
5,000-9,999	36	7.0%
10,000-24,999 *	14	2.7%
25,000-49,999 *	11	2.2%
50,000+	8	1.6%
Total	511	100.0% **

* Two libraries in each of these categories are county libraries that serve populations within the specified range.

** In this and in all tables following, 100% is identified as the total percentage even though rounding may produce a deviation of slightly more or less than 100%.

The 390 libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 (76.3% of the total number of public libraries in Iowa) constituted the universe for this study. A sample of 186 libraries was randomly selected from those 390 identified

in the 1981-1982 Iowa Public Library Statistics as serving a population of less than 2,500.[34] Fourteen Iowa public libraries serving that population range and identified as having participated in the 1981 Vavrek study were specifically included, creating a total sample of 200 libraries. The purpose of identifying and including the fourteen libraries from the Vavrek study was to make separate comparisons of the data produced from this subset with those produced from the other 186 libraries included in this survey sample.

A questionnaire was designed to gather data that could be compared to those produced from the Vavrek study. Permission was granted by Bernard Vavrek to utilize and/or modify questions posed in his 1981 nationwide survey.[35] Additional questions of particular interest to the author were also included. A self-administered questionnaire design was utilized to provide respondents the opportunity to consult library records and/or other staff members and to allow adequate time for responding to more complex questions. The number of open-ended questions was limited to increase the response rate and for ease in data analysis.

In an attempt to identify potential problems with the questionnaire design, a pretest of the questionnaire was conducted on a random sample of ten Illinois public libraries selected from a list of member libraries of the Lincoln Trail Libraries System and identified as serving a population of less than 2,500.[36] In February, 1984, ten questionnaires were mailed to the ten Illinois libraries. Six were returned.

Minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire format and the final survey instrument was produced. (The final questionnaire is reproduced in its entirety in the Appendix, pp. 73-76).

Two hundred questionnaires, accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes, were mailed to the sample of Iowa libraries on March 8, 1984. A cover letter, incorporated as the first page of the questionnaire, requested that the director or another staff member responsible for providing reference service complete the questionnaire. (The questionnaires were addressed to the individual identified as "librarian" or "in charge" in the 1983 American Library Directory.[37]

One hundred sixteen questionnaires (58%) were returned. From the remaining eighty-four libraries that had not responded to the initial mailing, fifty were selected. Eight of the fifty were those nonresponding libraries that had been identified as participating in the Vavrek study; the remaining forty-two were randomly selected. A follow-up letter and a second copy of the questionnaire were mailed to the fifty libraries on March 29, 1984. By April 30, 1984, twenty-one additional questionnaires had been returned resulting in a total response rate of 68.5% (137 libraries) including nine of the subset of fourteen from the 1981 Vavrek study. Three additional libraries returned the questionnaires uncompleted indicating they did not wish to participate. Distribution of the survey sample and respondents according to population

served are illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Survey Sample and Respondent Distribution According to Population Served

Population Served	Survey Sample	Survey Respondents
0-499	51	34
500-999	77	57
1,000-2,499	72	46
Total	200	137

Tabulation of all data was conducted manually by the author on columnar worksheets developed for each question facet. Questionnaires were identified according to population range served (0-499, 500-999, and 1,000-2,499) and coded accordingly to allow for separate data comparison if desired. The nine respondents identified as having participated in the 1981 Vavrek study were also separately coded. Originally it was planned to compare the data produced from the Vavrek subset sample with those produced from the other participants in this study. Enumeration of the data, however, revealed few differences in response patterns. The following data reported, therefore, are based on the total of 137 respondents. The three identified population range subsets (0-499, 500-999, and 1,000-2,499) are compared when such a break-down provides meaningful comparisons. Questionnaire design weaknesses are discussed as subsequently identified in the responses to specific questions. Chapter III provides a discussion of the findings

resulting from data analysis. Specific findings that provide a meaningful comparison to the results of the 1981 Vavrek study are briefly discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III

SURVEY FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The survey instrument was comprised of thirteen questions requesting responses concerning library service hours, annual budget, staff characteristics, and reference service policies, procedures, and problems. In order to clarify the basis of reported percentages, two response categories were established (in addition to those specified in the questionnaire) and utilized as needed throughout the process of data analysis: "No response" indicated no response was made and "unclear response" indicated the response could not be categorized into a distinct form that could be tabulated.

Each question is reproduced below to provide ease in understanding the reported findings and accompanying discussion.

In 1981 the Iowa Library Association membership approved the "Public Library Service in Iowa: Recommended Guidelines" (currently in effect) which defined basic quality and provided realistic goals toward which libraries could work.[38] The quantitative measurements outlined in the guidelines (derived from data submitted by Iowa public libraries in the annual survey of 1979) were median figures reflecting the fact that one half of the libraries were below the figures, and one half above.[39] Reference to elements of the Iowa guidelines that are pertinent to this study are

noted throughout the remainder of the report.

According to the Iowa guidelines, hours of service for libraries serving a population of 0-999 should be a minimum of 20 hours per week and for those libraries serving a population of 1,000-2,499, a minimum of 28 hours per week.[40] Libraries open less than 40 hours per week should have 25% of their minimum hours open during evenings and/or weekends.[41] For those libraries serving a population of 0-999, then, evening/weekend hours should include a minimum of 5 hours per week and for the 1,000-2,499 population range, 7 hours per week. Question 1 follows:

1. a. How many hours per week is the library open? . . . . ____
   b. Of these hours, how many are weekend or evening hours?____

Providing comparative data for the three subset population ranges, Table 3 shows that the average number of hours of service per week increased proportionately with population served. The range of total hours open per week was 4 - 38.

TABLE 3

Average Hours Open Per Week: Total and Weekend/Evening

Population Served	Average # Hours Open Per Week	
	Total *	Weekend/Evening **
0-499	12.96	4.49
500-999	16.13	4.94
1,000-2,499	23.52	7.28
0-2,499	17.85	5.61

* Average based on 135 libraries responding to question.

** Average based on 133 libraries responding to question.

Although some individual libraries met Iowa guideline minimums for the number of hours open per week, the average library did not. The range of weekend/evening hours open per week was 0 - 19. For each of the three population range subsets, the number of weekend/evening hours comprised from 30.6-34.6% of the total hours open per week, thus exceeding the 25% recommended by the Iowa guidelines.

The frequency distribution of libraries open for a specified number of hours per week (total hours and weekend/evening hours) is illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Frequency Distribution of Hours Open Per Week: Total Hours and Weekend/Evening Hours

	(N=137) Percentage of Libraries	
Hours Open Per Week	Total Hours Open	Weekend/Evening Hours Open
0	--	8.8%
1-9	9.5%	79.6%
10-19	46.7%	8.8%
20-29	37.2%	0.0%
30-39	5.1%	0.0%
No response	1.5%	2.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

As shown, 56.2% of the libraries were open less than 20 hours per week; 93.4% less than 30 hours per week. Most of the libraries (88.4%) were open less than 10 weekend/evening hours per week.

2. How much is the library's total budget for the current fiscal year? . . . . . _____

The average annual budget, analyzed according to subset population ranges increased proportionately to population served. (see Table 5)

TABLE 5

Average Annual Budget: 1983 Fiscal Year

Population Served	Average Annual Budget *
0-499	$ 7,187.08
500-999	8,527.20
1,000-2,499	17,910.45
0-2,499	$11,622.54

* Averages based on 110 libraries responding to question.

The range of budgets reported was $452 per year to $35,474 per year. The Iowa guidelines recommend that a public library should have an annual operating income of at least $10,000.[42] Table 5 indicates that the average library serving a population of 1,000-2,499 met this suggested minimum; the average library serving a population of 999 or less did not.

The frequency distribution of libraries within a specified annual budget range is shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Frequency Distribution of Annual Budget: 1983 Fiscal Year

(N=110)

Annual Budget Range	Percentage of Libraries Within Budget Range
$ 0-4,999	14.5%
5,000-9,999	36.4%
10,000-19,999	32.7%
20,000-29,999	14.5%
30,000-39,999	1.8%
Total	100.0%

Of the 100 libraries reporting usable data, 50.9% had an annual budget of less than $10,000. Thus, slightly more than half of the libraries responding did not meet the recommended minimum budget for Iowa public libraries.

It should be noted that one response ($44,000) seemed extraordinarily high in relation to all other responses in that population range (500-999). The suspected error was verified in the 1981-1982 Iowa Public Library Statistics and the 1983 American Library Directory. That response was eliminated from the averages in Table 5 and from the frequency distributions in Table 6.

Two unsolicited comments provide, perhaps, a more accurate description of the level of available financial resources: "The town and county donate money for us. We never know just how much until we receive it..." "I've been librarian about forty years...very little salary--$125 per year for four hours a week."

In stark contrast, and to illustrate the point that not all rural libraries are economically deprived, one respondent (without reporting the actual budget amount) commented, "We are a private foundation library and our budget is quite high."

3. Please complete those blanks appropriate for describing your staff.

	Paid Full-time	Paid Part-time	Volunteers
a. How many staff members are	_____	_____	_____
b. How many have achieved the following highest level of training?			
1. H.S. diploma	_____	_____	_____
2. 2 yrs. college . . .	_____	_____	_____
3. Bachelor's	_____	_____	_____
4. Master's in Library Science. . .	_____	_____	_____
5. Other_____ (specify)	_____	_____	_____
c. How many are responsible for providing reference service?.	_____	_____	_____
d. How many participated in library conferences or workshops in 1983?	_____	_____	_____
e. How many are current members of:			
1. American Library Association.	_____	_____	_____
2. Iowa Library Association.	_____	_____	_____
f. Each category of staff members (Full-time, Part-time, Volunteers) has accumulated how many years of library experience?	_____	_____	_____

The layout of Question 3 created unforseen confusion for some respondents and subsequent problems in data analysis. Although Question 3.a seemed to be clear in requesting the number of staff members in the three specified categories, the category headings (Full-time, Part-time, and Volunteers) were sometimes ignored in responding to all or some of the remaining parts of Question 3, e.g., data for 3.b through 3.f may have been recorded in the Full-time column, even though staff members had been specifically identified in 3.a as Part-time or Volunteers. Some responses, therefore, had to be tabulated as "unclear responses". More distinct vertical columns in the questionnaire layout may have eliminated or reduced this confusion.

Potential inconsistencies in defining "full-time" and "part-time" should be noted. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, persons who work 35 hours or more per week are designated as "full-time" and persons who work 1-34 hours per week are designated as "part-time."[43]

Since the libraries in this study reported an average service hour week of 17.85 hours, most staff members would be considered as "part-time" according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics definitions. However, many respondents indicated having full-time staff members. This was interpreted as full-time in relation to the number of hours the library was open. Other respondents indicated having only part-time staff members. This could have been interpreted as part-time in relation to the number of hours the library was open or part-time in relation to the generally defined 35-40 hour

work week. Responses were tabulated verbatim. This confusion might have been avoided or lessened had a brief definition of full-time and part-time been included in the questionnaire.

TABLE 7

Average Number of Staff Members Per Library

Staff Category	# Staff Reported	Average # Staff Members *
Paid full-time	47	.35
Paid part-time	203	1.50
Volunteers	95	.70
Total	345	2.55

* Averages based on 135 libraries responding to question.

As shown in Table 7, part-time staff members comprised the majority of the total average of 2.55 staff members per library. The high percentage of volunteers (more than twice that of full-time staff members) is not surprising considering the level of financial support available. The distribution of staff categories is reflected in the findings of all other questions regarding staff characteristics. The potential for inconsistency in defining full-time and part-time should be considered in interpreting the data in Table 7.

Question 3.b requested data on the highest level of training achieved by staff members. Table 8 provides a break-down of the percentages for each category (full-time, part-time, and volunteers).

TABLE 8

Highest Level of Training Achieved by Staff Members

Highest Level of Training	Percentage of Staff Members			
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Volunteers	Total
	(N=43)	(N=188)	(N=89)	(N=320)
H.S. diploma	41.9%	57.4%	38.2%	50.0%
2 yrs. college	16.3%	16.0%	20.2%	17.2%
Bachelor's degree	9.3%	8.0%	24.7%	12.8%
Master's:library science	2.3%	.5%	1.1%	.9%
Other *	9.3%	12.2%	0.0%	8.4%
Unclear response	20.9%	5.9%	15.7%	10.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* "Other" included 7 "in high school," 7 with "some college," 10 with "some continuing education beyond high school," and 3 with a subject Master's degree.

Before interpreting the data in Table 8, it should be pointed out that there is a discrepancy between the total number of staff members reported in Table 7 (345) and the total number in Table 8 (320). This difference may be attributed to no responses and/or staff members whose level of training was less than a high school diploma. The percentages of unclear responses should be considered in interpreting the data in Table 8. As shown, the highest level of training for 50% of all staff members reported (exclusive of the percentage of unclear responses) was a high school diploma. Thirty percent of all staff members had two years of college or a Bachelor's degree. Three staff members of the total 320 reported (.9%)

were identified as having a Master's degree in library science. The data show that a proportionately high percentage of volunteers had achieved two years of college or a Bachelor's degree.

The Iowa guidelines recommend that libraries serving a population of 0-2,500 should have a "library director" with an equivalent of two years of college and who consults with the librarians of the Iowa Regional Library System.[44] (A director with a Master's in library science is recommended for libraries serving a population of 5,000 or more).[45] Because the survey did not solicit specific information regarding the "director," it cannot be determined how many libraries met the state guidelines. Table 8 does show, however, that 30.9% of the total staff (exclusive of "other" and "unclear response" categories) had two years of college or more.

In response to Question 3.c, 1.9 staff members per library were reported as being responsible for providing reference service (see Table 9).

TABLE 9

Average Number of Staff Members Per Library
Responsible for Providing Reference Service

Staff Category	# Staff Reported	Average # Staff Members Responsible for Providing Reference Service *
1. Paid full-time	37	.28
2. Paid part-time	174	1.30
3. Volunteers	30	.22
4. Reported staff; not categorized by FT, PT, V **	13	.10
Total	254	1.90

* Averages based on 134 libraries responding to question.

** FT = full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers

Row 4 includes the number of additional staff members reported as providing reference service, but without any categorization as to full-time, part-time or volunteers. This break-down by category was deemed important in determining any correspondence between the total number of staff members in each category and those in each category responsible for providing reference service (see Table 10).

TABLE 10

Percentage of Total Number of Staff Members Reported Who Are Responsible for Providing Reference Service

Staff Category	Total Staff Reported	Staff Responsible for Providing Reference Service	
		Number	Percentage
			(N=345)
Paid full-time	47	37	
Paid part-time	203	174	
Volunteers	95	30	
Reported staff: not categorized by FT, PT, V *	...	13	
Total	345	254	73.6% **

* FT = full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers

** Percentages for individual staff categories could not be provided because 13 staff members were not categorized by full-time, part-time, or volunteers.

The data show that most staff members (73.6%) were responsible for providing reference service. These percentages should be reasonably valid since Table 7 was based on 135 responding libraries and Table 9 on 134.

Questions 3.d and 3.e were included in an attempt to investigate the level and characteristics of staff involvement in continuing education and/or professional organizations. The break-down by category (full-time, part-time, and volunteers) was utilized to provide the means for further comparison. Table 11 illustrates the total number (by category) of staff members who participated in library conferences or workshops in 1983.

TABLE 11

Average Number of Staff Members Who Participated in Conferences or Workshops in 1983

Staff Category	# Staff Reported	Average # Staff Members Per Library Who Participated in Conferences or Workshops in 1983 *
1. Paid full-time	19	.15
2. Paid part-time	100	.81
3. Volunteers	14	.11
4. Reported staff; not categorized by FT, PT, V**	18	.15
Total	151	1.22

* Averages based on 123 libraries responding to question.

** FT = full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers

The Iowa guidelines recommend that "the staff" of all libraries participate annually in continuing education activities.[46] Although "the staff" is not explicitly defined, Table 12 illustrates that 43.8% of the total staff members reported participated in workshops or conferences in 1983.

TABLE 12

Percentage of Total Number of Staff Members Reported Who Participated in Conferences or Workshops in 1983

Staff Category	Total Staff Reported	Staff Participating in Conferences or Workshops in 1983	
		Number	Percentage (N=345)
Paid full-time	47	19	
Paid part-time	203	100	
Volunteers	95	14	
Reported staff; not categorized by FT, PT, V *	...	18	
Total	345	151	43.8% **

* FT - full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers

** Percentages for individual staff categories could not be provided because 18 staff members were not categorized by full-time, part-time, or volunteers.

The comparison in Table 12 is based on data provided by 135 libraries reporting in Table 7 and 123 libraries reporting in Table 11, indicating the reliability is less than desired.

The low number of responses for Question 3.e was disappointing, but the data may at least provide a clue as to the involvement of staff members in professional organizations. Data concerning both national and state involvement were solicited in an effort to identify any preference. The average numbers of staff members who were current members of the American Library Association (Table 13) and the Iowa Library Association (Table 14) are shown below. Row 4 in each table includes the number of additional staff members reported as members, but not categorized as full-time, part-time, or volunteers.

TABLE 13

Average Number of Staff Members
Who Are Current Members of the American Library Association

Staff Category	# Staff Reported As Current ALA Members	Average # Staff Members Per Library Who Are Current Members of ALA *
1. Paid full-time	3	.04
2. Paid part-time	15	.20
3. Volunteers	1	.01
4. Reported staff: not categorized by FT, PT, V**	11	.15
Total	30	.4

* Averages based on 74 libraries responding to question.

** FT = full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers

TABLE 14

Average Number of Staff Members
Who Are Current Members of the Iowa Library Association

Staff Category	# Staff Reported As Current ILA Members	Average # Staff Members Per Library Who Are Current Members of ILA *
1. Paid full-time	20	.19
2. Paid part-time	66	.63
3. Volunteers	0	.00
4. Reported staff: not categorized by FT, PT, V **	8	.08
Total	94	.9

* Averages based on 105 libraries responding to question.
** FT = full-time; PT = part-time; V = volunteers.

The low response rate may have been attributed to the fact that the individual completing the questionnaire may simply not have known the status of the professional organization affiliation of other staff members (especially volunteers). The disparity in responses for the national and state organizations prevented any valid comparison between the two. An analysis of the 1981 membership of the Iowa Library Association showed that 48% of Iowa's public libraries had no voting membership in ILA (institutional, trustee, or personal membership); 95% of which represented communities serving a population of less than 2,500.[47] The analysis also indicated that the percentage of voting membership increased proportionately to the population area served.[48]

In an attempt to determine any significant characteristics regarding longevity of employment, Question 3.f solicited data on the total years of experience accumulated

among the three categories of staff members. The responses produced unclear and incomplete data, indicating again, perhaps, that many individuals completing the questionnaire did not know or could not determine the number of years of experience for all staff members (especially volunteers) and/or the possibility that the question itself may have been ambiguous.

TABLE 15

Average Years of Experience Accumulated for Full-time, Part-time, and Volunteer Staff Members

Staff Category	Total Years Accumulated Experience	Total # Staff To Which Experience Is Attributed	Average Years Experience
Paid full-time	458.0	44	10.40
Paid part-time	1,168.5	190	6.15
Volunteers	87.0	31	2.81
All staff	1,713.5	265 *	6.47

* This 265 represents 77% of the total 345 staff members reported (see Table 7). Either "no response" or "unclear response" was attributed to the remaining 80 staff members.

Based on data describing 265 of the 345 reported staff members, Table 15 illustrates that full-time staff members had the highest average of accumulated years of experience (10.4 yrs.) and that the total average accumulated years of experience for all staff members was 6.47 years. The missing data for 23% of the reported staff members must be considered in the interpretation of Table 15.

The complexity of Question 3 and the ultimate problems in respondent interpretation and data analysis did not become apparent during the pretest. The attempt to analyze all responses by specified staff category may have increased the confusion. The respondents should be commended for their contributions despite the structure of the question.

4. a. Do you consider the following as reference service?			b. How often does your library provide this service?		
			Regularly	Occasionally	Never
	Yes	No	R	O	N
1. Assisting patrons in finding answers?	___	___	___	___	___
2. Answering questions by telephone?	___	___	___	___	___
3. Directing patrons to community resources?	___	___	___	___	___
4. Assisting patrons in selecting materials?	___	___	___	___	___
5. Giving individual library-use instruction?	___	___	___	___	___
6. Preparing bibliographies for patrons?	___	___	___	___	___

The purpose of Question 4.a was to determine which of six specified library activities the respondents considered as reference service. An open-ended question might have produced a more accurate concept of reference service, but was not

used in order to provide greater ease in data analysis. As illustrated in Table 16, the majority of respondents indicated they considered all specified library activities as reference service, with the exception of preparing bibliographies for patrons (only 43.8% of the respondents considered this activity as reference service). "Finding answers" produced the highest percentage (95.6%) of "yes" responses. The response category "don't know" was considered for this question, but was eliminated in an effort to force respondents into sharing an opinion.

TABLE 16

Percentage of Respondents Indicating Specified Activity Is Considered As Reference Service

(N=137)

Activity	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Assist patrons in finding answers	95.6%	3.6%	.7%	100.0%
Answer questions by telephone	87.6%	6.6%	5.8%	100.0%
Direct patron to community resources	84.7%	11.7%	3.6%	100.0%
Assist patrons in selecting materials	78.8%	19.7%	1.4%	100.0%
Give individual library-use instruction	70.1%	24.1%	5.8%	100.0%
Prepare bibliographies for patrons	43.8%	46.0%	10.2%	100.0%

Part b of Question 4 was added to determine the frequency that libraries provided the specified library activities, whether or not they were considered as reference services.

TABLE 17

Frequency Distribution of Providing Specified Service/Activity

(N=137)

Service/Activity	* Reg.	Occ.	Nev.	Un Res.	No Res.	Total
Assist patrons in finding answers	78.1%	13.9%	5.8%	.7%	1.4%	100.0%
Answer questions by telephone	49.0%	39.4%	7.3%**	.7%	3.6%	100.0%
Direct patron to community resources	32.8%	55.5%	4.4%	.7%	6.6%	100.0%
Assist patrons in selecting materials	75.2%	17.5%	0.0%	.7%	6.6%	100.0%
Give individual library-use instruction	33.6%	53.3%	6.6%	.7%	5.8%	100.0%
Prepare bibliographies for patrons	2.9%	35.8%	48.2%	1.4%	11.7%	100.0%

* Reg. = Regularly; Occ. - Occasionally; Nev. = Never; UnRes. = Unclear Response; NoRes. = No Response

** Six of those responding "Never" to "answering questions by telephone" indicated their libraries did not have a telephone.

Table 17 shows that the most regularly offered services included (in order of frequency) 1) assisting patrons in finding answers, 2) assisting patrons in selecting materials, and 3) answering questions by telephone. The least frequently offered service was preparing bibliographies for patrons. One respondent commented: "We are small. I locate books for people. I don't make lists of books, just stacks of books."

The 1983 ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science defines "policy" as "an administrative plan or series of guidelines, preferably written, which delineate acceptable practices and actions for a wide range of activities within

an organization."[49] This definition was adopted for Question 5 which sought information regarding the extent Iowa rural public libraries used or had a written policy statement on reference services offered.

	Yes	No
5. a. Does your library have a written policy statement on reference services offered?	___	___
b. If yes, what published standards or guidelines were used in the formulation of the policy?		

Responses to Question 5 indicated that only 8% of the libraries surveyed had a written policy statement (see Table 18).

TABLE 18

Percentage of Libraries Having a Written Policy Statement on Reference Services Offered

(N=137)

Response	Percentage of Libraries
Yes	8.0%
No	88.3%
Don't know	1.4%
No response	2.2%
Total	100.0%

The two unsolicited "don't know" responses were recorded verbatim. Two libraries that responded "no" included comments indicating that they "wanted to" or were "working on" developing such a policy.

In response to the request for identification of specific published standards or guidelines used in formulating a reference service policy statement, the "Library Bill of Rights"

and an unidentified "ALA" guideline were the two "published" documents reportedly used (see Table 19).

TABLE 19

Published Standards or Guidelines Used in Formulating Written Policy Statement on Reference Services Offered

Standard/Guideline	Number of Libraries
Library Bill of Rights	1
"ALA"	1
Other locally derived	3
No specific guidelines	5
Unclear response	1
Total	11

The Iowa guidelines recommend that an active program to promote the use of library materials be initiated.[50] Question 6 was included to determine to what extent the libraries publicized or marketed reference services to the community.

6. Which of the following does your library use to publicize reference services offered?

	Yes	No
a. speaking engagements.	___	___
b. programs/workshops.	___	___
c. library tours	___	___
d. newspaper	___	___
e. brochures/posters	___	___
f. newsletters	___	___
g. other_____ (please specify)	___	___

The relatively high percentage of non-responses to some elements of Question 6 should be taken into consideration in interpreting the data in Table 20.

TABLE 20

Percentage of Respondents Indicating Activities Used to Publicize Reference Services

(N=137)

Activity	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Speaking engagements	27.0%	40.9%	32.1%	100.0%
Programs/workshops	21.9%	40.1%	38.0%	100.0%
Library tours	51.8%	24.1%	24.1%	100.0%
Newspaper	83.9%	6.6%	9.5%	100.0%
Brochures/posters	46.0%	24.8%	29.2%	100.0%
Newsletters	11.7%	46.0%	42.3%	100.0%
Other *	11.7%	10.9%	77.4%	100.0%

* "Other" included "word-of-mouth," radio/t.v., (cable t.v. and radio spots supported by larger area libraries), and school cooperation.

The most frequently used activities for publicizing reference services offered were the newspaper, library tours, and brochures/posters. The least frequently used activity was newsletters. In view of the alternative channels of communication available, the use of the local newspaper would be an effective means of reaching most community residents, as opposed to the least frequently used newsletter which would be subject to the constraints of financial and human resources.

The Iowa guidelines recommend that annual statistical data be provided for holdings, circulation, and expenditures--reference service data are not designated.[51] To determine the kinds of reference service records kept, Question 7 included five specified types as well as the category "other." Brief definitions and an example of "directional" and "reference" questions were provided in an effort to clarify the meaning

of the two terms. The complete definition for each (adopted from the Library Data Collection Handbook) is provided in the Glossary in the Appendix, p. 77).[52] Table 21 summarizes the kinds of reference service records kept.

TABLE 21

Percentage of Respondents Indicating Specific Reference Service Records Kept

(N=137)

Record	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Total number of questions asked	44.5%	47.4%	8.0%	100.0%
Number of directional questions	26.3%	67.9%	5.8%	100.0%
Number of reference questions	46.0%	44.5%	9.5%	100.0%
Recurring reference questions	29.2%	55.5%	15.3%	100.0%
Reference questions not answered	45.2%	43.1%	11.7%	100.0%
Other *	5.1%	13.9%	81.0%	100.0%

* "Other" included: reference questions referred to the regional library, reference questions there was no time to answer (limited patron or staff time), number of reference questions answered, and source from which answer was found, e.g., in-house, regional library, etc.

With almost identical frequency (44.5-46%) the three types of records most frequently kept were 1) number of reference questions, 2) number of reference questions not answered, and 3) total number of questions asked. The least frequently kept records were the number of directional questions asked and the number of recurring reference questions asked. The limited number of staff and the competition of other demanding

responsibilities may extensively affect the amount of record keeping. As one respondent commented: "We don't keep records. Our primary purpose is to serve the patron and not spend all our time record keeping."

To determine the extent the libraries received requests for information-seeking assistance, respondents were asked to estimate the average number of directional and reference questions received in the library or by telephone per week.

8. What is your best estimate of the average number of questions asked per week in 1983?

	In Library	By Telephone
a. Directional questions.	_____	_____
b. Reference questions.	_____	_____

Because the number of libraries reporting usable data varied for each type of question, Table 22 identifies the number of reporting libraries upon which each weekly average was based (see (N=) for each type of question).

TABLE 22

Estimate of Average Number of Directional and Reference Questions Asked Per Week

Type of Question	# Libraries Reporting Usable Data	Total # Questions Reported	Weekly Average Per Library
Directional: in library	(N=102)	1,964.5 *	19.26 *
Directional: by telephone	(N=82)	571.5	6.97
Reference: in library	(N=112)	3,735.5 **	33.35 **
Reference: by telephone	(N=85)	797.5	9.38
Total		7,069.0	68.96

* One response for "directional: in library" questions asked indicated 500 questions were asked per week. With 12 hours of service per week, the result would be 41.6 questions per hour--a comparatively high estimate.

** One response for "reference: in library" questions asked indicated 1500 questions were asked per week. With 21 hours of service per week, the result would be 71.4 questions per hour--an exceptionally high estimate.

As noted in Table 22, two estimates seemed high in relation to other responses and in relation to the resultant average question per hour. They were, however, included in the total and the averages. These two estimates, the inconsistency in the number of libraries reporting usable data, and the fact that six libraries reported having no telephone should be considered in interpreting the data. The total estimated number of questions asked per week (7,069) included 35.9% directional and 64.1% reference questions. The average estimated number of questions asked per week was 68.96 per library. The frequency distribution of libraries reporting the number of estimated directional and reference questions is illustrated in Table 23.

TABLE 23

Frequency Distribution of Estimated Directional and Reference Questions Asked Per Week

Questions Asked Per Week	Number of Libraries Reporting					Percentage of Libraries Reporting * (N=391)
	Dir. Lib.	Dir. Tel.	Ref. Lib.	Ref. Tel.**	Total	
0-9	57	66	52	67	242	61.9%
10-49	36	14	47	13	110	28.1%
50-99	6	1	8	4	19	4.9%
100-199	1	1	2	0	4	1.0%
200-299	1	0	2	1	4	1.0%
300-399	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
400-499	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
500+	1	0	1	0	2	.5%
Unclear response	2	2	3	3	10	2.6%
No response	33	53	22	49	...	...
Total					391	100.0%

* "No response" excluded from percentages to give a more accurate representation of frequencies.

** Dir.Lib. = Directional: in library; Dir.Tel. = Directional: by telephone; Ref.Lib. = Reference: in library; Ref.Tel.: = Reference: by telephone.

The data show that 61.9% of the libraries reporting usable data received an estimated 0-9 questions per week in each category of question ("no responses" were excluded from the percentages to give a more accurate representation of frequencies). The priority some respondents placed on "service" rather than record keeping can be illustrated by one respondent's comment: "I'm sure I don't remember to tally or count all the questions I answer. Service is more important than making the count. Interruptions and distractions are the greatest discredit to good reference service."

The potential problems of ranked responses were realized and actualized during the process of data analysis. Unfortunately, Questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 reflected the effects of the inherent problems which included tied ranks, multiple ranks or incomplete ranks, e.g., ranking only two of a requested six items. Sudman and Bradburn suggest that some respondents simply find rankings difficult, and will make no more than a first choice.[53] Ranking items that are quite different from one another or items that are all very desirable or undesirable are said to be particularly difficult.[54]

In analyzing the data, tied and multiple rankings were recorded as "unclear responses" and those items which were not ranked were recorded as "no response". All percentages were based on reported usable data. Despite the problems encountered, the respondents are again commended for interpreting the intent of the questions as well as they did.

9. The following identify categories of questions:

1. arts/humanities	6. law/government
2. business/career	7. medical/health
3. consumer/self-help	8. scientific/technical
4. geography/history	9. travel/recreational
5. hobbies/crafts	10. other_____ (please specify)

a. Of the categories of questions listed above, what are the 3 categories patrons most frequently ask? (Please indicate number code)

1. Most frequent. . . . . ___
2. 2nd most frequent. . . . . ___
3. 3rd most frequent. . . . . ___

b. Of the categories of questions listed above, what are the categories you find most difficult to answer? (Please indicate number code)

1. Most frequent. . . . . ___
2. 2nd most frequent. . . . . ___
3. 3rd most frequent. . . . . ___

Question 9 listed ten subject categories (nine specified and "other"). The purpose of this two-part question was to identify subject categories of questions that were a) most frequently asked and b) most difficult to answer. Table 24 summarizes the subject categories of questions most frequently asked.

TABLE 24

Categories of Questions Most Frequently Asked

Category	Most Frequently Asked *			Highest Combined Percentages
	First	Second	Third	
	(N=132)	(N=131)	(N=131)	
Arts/humanities	2.3%	3.8%	4.7%	
Business/career	2.3%	4.6%	5.5%	
Consumer/self-help	14.7%	14.6%	14.1%	43.4%
Geography/history	27.1%	13.8%	9.4%	50.3%
Hobbies/crafts	38.0%	23.1%	16.4%	77.5%
Law/government	0.0%	2.3%	3.1%	
Medical/health	7.8%	23.1%	24.2%	55.1%
Scientific/technical	3.1%	7.7%	10.1%	
Travel/recreational	.8%	4.6%	12.5%	
Other **	3.9%	2.3%	0.0%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

* Percentages based on number of libraries reporting usable data.

**"Other" included school projects, genealogy, quilting, and home improvement. The author recognizes that quilting should be included in Hobbies/crafts, but the respondent did not choose to categorize it as such.

The highest percentages of categories most frequently, second most frequently and third most frequently asked are underlined. The data show that hobbies/crafts; medical/health; geography/history; and consumer/self-help were consistently frequent categories of questions asked.

Table 25 summarizes the subject categories of questions most difficult to answer.

TABLE 25

Categories of Questions Most Difficult To Answer

Category	Most Difficult to Answer *			Highest Combined Percentages
	First	Second	Third	
	(N=127)	(N=125)	(N=123)	
Arts/humanities	7.9%	7.2%	16.4%	31.5%
Business/career	12.6%	11.2%	21.3%	45.1%
Consumer/self-help	2.4%	5.6%	7.4%	
Geography/history	2.4%	4.8%	5.7%	
Hobbies/crafts	0.0%	1.6%	4.1%	
Law/government	20.5%	36.0%	13.1%	69.6%
Medical/health	7.9%	6.4%	7.4%	
Scientific/technical	41.7%	23.2%	15.6%	80.5%
Travel/recreational	3.9%	3.2%	9.0%	
Other *	.7%	.8%	0.0%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

* Percentages based on number of libraries reporting usable data.

** "Other" included school projects and genealogy.

The highest percentages of categories most frequently, second most frequently, and third most frequently asked are underlined. The categories of scientific/technical; law/government; business/career; and arts/humanities were consistently frequent categories of questions most difficult to answer.

It is interesting to compare the categories of questions most frequently asked (Table 24) with those most difficult to answer (Table 25). The categories most difficult to answer were not the most frequently asked. That could be interpreted in several ways: a) the libraries collect materials in subject areas most frequently requested but do not or perhaps cannot (because of limited funds) collect materials in subject areas

less frequently requested; b) staff members tend to be less knowledgeable or experienced with categories difficult to answer; c) the categories most difficult to answer require the subject expertise of individuals specifically trained in that particular field; or d) a combination of any or all of the above.

Question 10 was included to determine if "difficult to answer" subject categories could be attributed to a specific reason(s).

10. Please rank (1-5) the most frequent reasons why the categories of questions identified in Question 9.b are most difficult to answer. (Most frequent = 1)

a. lack of specialized reference staff. . . ___
b. lack of needed reference materials . . . ___
c. lack of time . . . . . ___
d. question too technical . . . . . ___
e. other _____ ___
(please specify)

Table 26 illustrates the most frequent reasons reported.

TABLE 26

Most Frequent Reasons Why Categories Identified in Question 9 (Table 25) Are Most Difficult to Answer

Reason	Rank * 1	2	3	4	5	Total
Lack of specialized reference staff (N=94)	16.0%	23.4%	35.1%	22.3%	3.2%	100.0%
Lack of needed reference materials (N=101)	56.4%	24.8%	11.9%	4.9%	2.0%	100.0%
Lack of time (N=99)	5.1%	18.2%	28.3%	41.4%	7.0%	100.0%
Question too technical (N=99)	22.2%	34.3%	25.3%	16.2%	2.0%	100.0%
Other ** (N=21)	9.5%	0.0%	14.3%	4.8%	71.4%	100.0%

* Percentages based on number of libraries reporting usable data (see (N=) for each "reason").

** "Other" included lack of current/specific information, limited money, and not enough help.

The most frequent reasons according to rank were: 1) lack of needed reference materials, 2) question too technical, 3) lack of specialized reference staff, 4) lack of time, and 5) other (responses included lack of current/specific information, limited money, and not enough help). The responses to this question can be correlated to the responses to Question 12 (p. 47). The lack of reference materials and lack of specialized reference training were consistently strong concerns.

In Question 11, respondents were asked to rank specified possible methods for handling reference questions that could not be answered.

11. Please rank (1-6) the method your library most frequently uses to handle reference questions you cannot answer. (Most frequent = 1)

    a. Direct patrons to another library. . . . . ___
    b. Contact another library or regional library system . . . ___
    c. Direct patrons to a source other than a library. . . . . ___
       Please specify 2 most common sources:
       1. _____
       2. _____
    d. Interlibrary loan. . . . . ___
    e. No further action. . . . . ___
    f. Other _____ ___
       (please specify)

A few respondents commented that, for them, "b" (contacting another library or regional library system) and "d" (interlibrary loan) were the same method. The intent in offering both methods was to accommodate simply contacting another library to answer a question (b) and requesting materials through interlibrary loan (d). The two methods, perhaps, should have been more clearly defined in the question or combined. A summary of the methods most frequently used is provided in Table 27.

TABLE 27

Methods Most Frequently Used to Handle
Reference Questions That Cannot Be Answered

Method	Rank * 1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Direct patron to another library (N=98)	6.1%	19.4%	38.8%	26.5%	8.2%	1.0%	100.0%
Contact another library or regional system (N=104)	57.7%	28.8%	9.6%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Direct patron to source other than library (N=101)	3.0%	17.8%	38.6%	36.6%	4.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Interlibrary loan (N=99)	34.3%	41.4%	12.1%	8.1%	4.0%	0.0%	100.0%
No further action taken (N=83)	1.2%	1.2%	4.8%	9.6%	60.2%	22.9%	100.0%
Other ** (N=24)	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%	12.5%	20.8%	62.5%	100.0%

* Percentages based on number of libraries reporting usable data (see (N=) for each "method").

** "Other" included individuals in the community, materials from home, and community agencies.

The most frequently used methods according to rank were: 1) contact another library or regional system, 2) interlibrary loan, 3) direct patrons to another library, 4) direct patrons to a source other than a library, 5) no further action taken, and 6) other (responses included individuals in the community, materials from home, and community agencies).

Part c of Question 11 sought to elicit particular non-library sources to which patrons were most frequently directed for questions that could not be answered. These

sources are listed, with frequency of responses, in Table 28.

TABLE 28

Two Most Common Sources (Other Than a Library) to Which Patrons Are Directed for Reference Questions Which Cannot be Answered

(N=127)

Source	Percentage of Libraries Using Source
1. Local individuals, experts	22.8%
2. Government agencies	18.1%
3. County extension service	17.3%
4. Other local agencies	9.4%
5. Schools	6.3%
6. Historical society	3.2%
7. Regional library *	12.6%
8. Other libraries *	9.4%
9. Interlibrary loan *	.8%
Total	100.0%

* These three sources were identified despite a request for non-library sources.

As shown, local individuals, government agencies, and county extension services were reported as the most common sources utilized or contacted other than libraries. The establishment of a network of local resources is obviously a common practice. Combining all "local" resources (the first six listed in Table 28) produce 77.1% of the most common sources contacted (other than a library).

Assuming that library staff members can most accurately identify factors that would most contribute to improving reference service in their libraries, Question 12 provided seven factors (six specified plus "other") which were to be ranked.

12. Please rank (1-7) the factors that would most contribute to improving reference service in your library. (Greatest contribution = 1)

a. additional hours of service. . . . . ___
b. additional staff . . . . . ___
c. additional reference training. . . . . ___
d. additional reference materials . . . . . ___
e. additional public relations. . . . . ___
f. analysis of community needs. . . . . ___
g. other _____ ___
(please specify)

Rankings and their percentages are provided in Table 29.

TABLE 29

Factors That Would Most Contribute to Improving Reference Service

Factor	Rank * 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Additional hours of service (N=98)	14.3%	15.3%	24.5%	17.3%	14.3%	12.2%	2.0%	100.0%
Additional staff (N=99)	5.0%	15.2%	21.2%	15.2%	11.1%	30.3%	2.0%	100.0%
Additional reference training (N=106)	11.3%	41.5%	14.2%	17.9%	8.5%	6.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Additional reference materials (N=111)	69.4%	11.7%	10.8%	5.4%	1.8%	0.0%	.9%	100.0%
Additional public relations (N=98)	1.0%	4.1%	13.3%	28.6%	32.6%	18.4%	2.0%	100.0%
Analysis of community needs (N=94)	4.2%	14.9%	18.1%	18.1%	21.3%	22.3%	1.1%	100.0%
Other ** (N=23)	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	8.7%	0.0%	87.0%	100.0%

* Percentages based on number of libraries reporting usable data (see (N=) for each "factor").

** "Other" included more money, more "customers," more interest from the board, and a more complete catalog. Seventeen of the 23 who ranked "other" did not specify a contributing factor.

Factors selected as those that would most contribute to improving reference service according to rank were: 1)additional reference materials, 2) additional reference training, 3) additional hours of service, 4) additional public relations, 5) additional staff, and 6) other (responses included more money, more "customers," more interest from the board, and a more complete card catalog.) It should be pointed out that "additional reference training" received a higher ranking than "additional staff."

The Iowa guidelines recommend that libraries provide an analysis of community resources, use patterns, current census data, needs by groups and agencies and community lifestyles.[55] One library indicated a community analysis had just been completed and offered to share a copy of the published results with the author. That document provided a veritable wealth of descriptive data, and is referred to in Chapter V, p. 68.

The final question sought to determine if there was a consensus among library staff members in identifying the titles of reference materials considered most essential in their libraries.

13. What are the titles of the 5 reference materials you consider most essential in your library?

a._____

b._____

c._____

d._____

e._____

Many responses to Question 13 indicated types or formats, e.g., encyclopedias, government publications, etc., or subject areas, e.g., geography, crafts, science, etc., rather than specific titles. All responses, however, were useful in formulating the results summarized in Table 30.

TABLE 30

Types/Subjects of the Five Reference Materials Considered Most Essential in the Library

(N=585)

Type/Subject	Percentage of Libraries Identifying as Essential
Encyclopedias	25.1%
Almanacs	10.4%
Geography/history	8.4%
Periodical indexes	7.5%
Dictionaries	6.1%
Medical/health	5.3%
Local/state history	4.8%
Bibliographic resources	4.3%
Biographies	4.3%
Periodicals	4.1%
Science	3.6%
Consumer/self-help	3.6%
Arts/crafts	2.9%
Government publications	2.1%
Other *	7.5%
Total	100.0%

* "Other" included miscellaneous reference, miscellaneous subject areas and one unique source: "children...for school work."

Frequently cited titles within certain subject areas or types were identified. These are illustrated in Table 31 in the Appendix, p. 72.

Brief comparisons of the findings of this study, those of Bernard Vavrek's 1981 nationwide study, and selective elements of other pertinent studies are discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

COMPARISON OF FINDINGS TO OTHER STUDIES

This study was modeled after the 1981 nationwide study of reference service in rural public libraries conducted by Bernard Vavrek. It is imperative, therefore, that the resultant findings of both be compared. Many of the questions used in this study were patterned after those used by Vavrek in an attempt to obtain comparable data. As noted earlier, although Vavrek's study surveyed libraries serving a population of 25,000 or less, a subset of libraries serving less than 2,500 (234 libraries) was identified and separate data for this population subset were generally provided for most questions. Comparisons between the two studies were made only in regard to the population range of less than 2,500. All data reported from the Vavrek study were derived from Vavrek's report, Reference Service in Rural Public Libraries,[56] and relevant pages are cited as required. When available and pertinent, national data describing libraries serving a population less than 10,000 (from Statistics of Public Libraries 1977-1978)[57] are also provided.

Comparisons are arranged by question number (of this study) and are discussed when data can be validly compared. The reader should be reminded that the Iowa study findings

reflect 1984 data and the Vavrek study findings reflect 1981 data. The following abbreviations are used in comparing data: This study = Iowa; Vavrek's study = Vavrek.

Question 1. Average Number of Hours Library is Open Per Week

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 35)
(N=135)	(N=not available)
17.85 hrs.	25 hrs.

According to the Statistics of Public Libraries 1977-1978 37.4% of the public libraries serving a population of less than 10,000 were open less than 20 hours per week.[58]

Question 2. Average Annual Budget

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 10)
(N=110)	(N= not available)
$11,622.54	$28,464

Vavrek's average annual budget was nearly 2.45 times higher despite the effect of inflation between the two studies. According to the Statistics of Public Libraries 1977-1978 46.8% of those libraries serving a population of less than 10,000 had an annual budget of less than $10,000.[59]

Question 3.a. Average Number of Staff Members Per Library

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 8)
(N=135)	(N=not available)
2.55/library	4.75/library
(by category)	(by category)
13.6% full-time	27.4% full-time
58.8% part-time	36.0% part-time
27.5% volunteers	36.6% volunteers

The average number of staff members per library from the Vavrek study was nearly twice that in the Iowa study and the percentage of staff in each category was more evenly distributed.

Question 3.c. Average Number of Staff Members Responsible for Providing Reference Service

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 8)
(N=134)	(N=not available)
1.9/library	3.94/library

The average number of staff members responsible for providing reference service in the Vavrek study was more than twice that in the Iowa study. This difference reflects the average number of total staff members reported (see Question 3.a.)

Question 4.b. Frequency of Regularly Providing Reference Service Activities

	Iowa	Vavrek (p. 17)
	(N=137)	(N= not available)
Assisting patrons in finding answers	78.1%	89.7%
Assisting patrons in selecting materials	75.2%	88.5%
Answering questions by telephone	49.0%	76.1%
Give library-use instruction	33.6%	47.4%
Direct patrons to community resources	32.8%	55.6%
Prepare bibliographies for patrons	2.9%	10.7%

With the exception of answering questions by telephone, both studies reported correspondingly similar frequencies for regularly providing specific service activities.

Question 5.a. Percentage of Libraries Having a Written Policy Statement for Reference Services

Iowa	Vavrek (pp. 14-15)
(N=137)	(N=234)
8.0%	11.5%

The findings from both studies were correspondingly similar.

Question 5.b. Percentage of Libraries Consulting Published Standards/Guidelines for Formulating Policy Statement

Iowa	Vavrek (pp. 14-15)
(N=11)	(N=27)
18.2%	59.3%

Although Vavrek's findings were significantly higher, no specific guidelines or standards were identified.

Question 7. Percentage of Libraries Keeping Records on [Total] Number of Questions Asked

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 18)
(N=137)	(N=234)
44.5%	27.8%

The Vavrek study solicited data on "Do you keep a record of the number of questions asked?". The Iowa study solicited data for the <u>total</u> number of questions asked (as well as other specific types of questions). This subtle difference in question terminology may have effected differences in response patterns or a greater percentage of Iowa libraries may keep

a record of the number of questions asked.

Question 8. Estimated Average Number of Questions Asked Per Week

Iowa	Vavrek (p. 18)
(N=82-112)	(N=not available)
68.96/wk.	118.1/wk.
35.9% = directional 64.1% = reference	51.7% = directional 48.2% = reference

Vavrek's findings were 71% higher for the weekly average and directional/reference questions were more evenly distributed. Vavrek pointed out in his report that the results of this question must be considered "soft" because the majority of libraries in his study (72.2%) did not keep records of questions asked.[60]

Question 10. Three Most Frequent Reasons Identified Categories of Questions Were Difficult to Answer

	Iowa	Vavrek (p. 24)
	(N=21-101)	(N=48-179)
Lack of needed reference materials	1.	1.
Question too technical	2.	2.
Lack of specialized reference staff	3.	3.

An identical order of rankings was identified in the findings from both studies.

Question 11.a. Most Frequently Used Methods to Handle Questions That Cannot Be Answered

	Iowa (N=24-104)	Vavrek (p. 25) (N=48-209)
Contact another library or regional system *	1.	2.
Interlibrary loan	2.	1.
Direct patron to another library	3.	3.

* Vavrek used the terminology "telephone another library" instead of "contact another library." The three most frequently used methods are correspondingly similar.

Question 11.b. Most Common Sources (Other Than a Library) To Which Patrons Are Directed For Questions Which Cannot Be Answered

	Iowa (N=127)	Vavrek (p. 26) (N=217)
Local individuals	1.	3.
Government agencies	2.	1.
Extension service	3.	4.
Other local agencies	4.	2.

Although ranked differently in frequency, the most common sources utilized were correspondingly similar.

Question 12. Factors That Would Most Contribute Toward Improving Reference Service

	Iowa (N=23-111)	Vavrek (p. 29) (N=163)
Additional reference materials	1.	1.
Additional reference training	2.	...
Additional hours of service	3.	...
Additional staff	...	2.
More money	...	3.

The differences noted above may be attributed to the fact that the Iowa study data were based on a ranked response question and the Vavrek study data on an open-ended question.

Question 13. Most Frequently Cited Titles of Reference Materials Considered as Most Essential in the Library

	Iowa
Encyclopedia	World Book Encyclopedia
Index	Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
Almanac	World Almanac and Book of Facts

The Vavrek study did not include this question. A 1980 survey of reference sources used by public libraries in three Illinois regional systems, however, reported the same titles as listed above for half or more of those public libraries serving a population of less than 10,000.[61]

The findings of this study and of the Vavrek study were correspondingly similar for the following:

1) frequency of regularly provided reference service activities

2) percentage of libraries having a written policy statement for reference services provided

3) most frequent reasons that identified categories of questions were difficult to answer

4) most frequently used methods to handle reference questions that cannot be answered

5) most common sources other than a library to which patrons are directed for questions which cannot be answered

6) factors that would most contribute to improving reference service.

The Vavrek study reported higher averages or percentages for the following:

1) number of hours library is open per week

2) total number of staff members per library

3) number of staff members responsible for providing reference service

4) average annual budget

5) percentage of libraries consulting published standards/guidelines for formulation of a written policy statement for reference services provided

6) number of questions asked per week.

This study reported a higher percentage of libraries keeping records on the number of questions asked .

The number of reporting libraries on which the Vavrek study averages and percentages were based was not available for half of the questions compared. Thus, it cannot be determined if the data are representative of the sample.

The differences in findings may be attributed to the proportionate differences in the population range subsets of each sample as shown in Table 32.

TABLE 32

Comparison of Survey Population Samples of Iowa and Vavrek Studies

Population Served	Percentage of Iowa Sample (N=137)	Percentage of Vavrek Sample (p.9) (N=234)
0-499	24.8%	14.3%
500-999	41.6%	24.2%
1,000-2,4999	33.6%	61.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

As shown, the Vavrek study sample included a greater percentage of respondents serving a population of 1,000-2,499. This study indicated that hours of service (Table 3) and annual budget (Table 5) increased proportionately to population served. It is possible that the population range distribution affected other data as well. Specific population range subsets (0-499, 500-999, and 1,000-2,499) could not be compared between the two studies since Vavrek's report did not provide data to that degree.

With a significantly lower average annual budget attributed to Iowa rural public libraries (less than half that found in Vavrek's national study) one might expect library service characteristics and patterns to be governed accordingly. It is important to point out that this budget difference occurred despite the inflationary effects of a three year time span between the two studies. Without direct state aid Iowa's public libraries would be even more

dependent upon the support provided by local taxation, which is dependent upon the limited population base--the perpetuity of an ordered pattern dictated by community size.

In addition to economic and population contingencies, the basic diversity and impreciseness of "rural" may be reflected in comparisons between/among rural entities. The "rural" of Iowa, Mississippi, Alaska, and New York exemplify as much heterogeneity as homogeneity. The "rural" of the United States, however, (as characterized by a nationwide study) may reflect a merger of the diversities fundamental to its constituents. Comparison of the two studies confirms the pluralism of rural and challenges any hypothesized generalizations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study has been to gather information about the general characteristics and patterns of reference services provided in Iowa rural public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500. The secondary purpose has been to compare the findings to those resulting from a 1981 nationwide survey of reference services in rural public libraries conducted by Bernard Vavrek. Modeled after the Vavrek study, a self-administered questionnaire was mailed to a sample of 200 of the 390 Iowa public libraries identified as meeting the population criteria. Fourteen of the 200 were specifically selected (identified as participants in the 1981 Vavrek study) and 186 were randomly selected. A 68.5% return produced data from 137 libraries.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize the findings of the study, point out some of the inherent limitations, and discuss some of the conclusions that can be drawn.

Summary of the Findings

1. Hours of service and level of financial support increased proportionately to an increase in population served.

Although some individual libraries met the Iowa guidelines for minimum hours of service, the average library serving a population of less than 2,500 (with 17.85 hours of service per week) did not. The average library serving a population of 1,000-2,499 (33.6% of the sample) met the Iowa guidelines recommending a minimum annual budget of $10,000 per year; the average library serving a population of 999 or less (66.4% of the sample) did not.

2. The average number of staff members in Iowa public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 was 2.55; 58.8% part-time, 27.5% volunteers, and 13.7% full-time. Staff members who were responsible for providing reference service comprised 73.6% of the total number of staff members.

3. Excluding 19% of the staff members identified as "other" or attributed to an unclear response, the highest level of training achieved by 50% of all staff members in libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 was a high school diploma. Of the remaining categories 17.2% of the total staff members had two years of college, 12.8% had a Bachelor's degree and .9% had a Master's degree in library science.

4. Of the staff members reported, 43.8% participated in library conferences or workshops in 1983. More staff members were current members of the Iowa Library Association than the American Library Association, but a low response rate may have produced an inaccurate representation of the sample.

5. The average number of years of accumulated experience was 10.4 years for full-time staff members; 6.15 years for part-time staff members; and 2.81 years for volunteers. The

average years of accumulated experience for all categories of staff members was 6.47 years.

6. The majority of Iowa public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500 considered assisting patrons in finding answers, answering questions by telephone, directing patrons to community resources, assisting patrons in selecting materials, and giving library-use instruction as reference services. Only "assisting patrons in finding answers" and "assisting patrons in selecting materials" were regularly provided by the majority of responding libraries. More than half of the respondents did not consider "preparing bibliographies for patrons" as a reference service and nearly half of the responding libraries "never" provided that service. Only 8% of the libraries indicated they had a written policy statement on reference services provided.

7. The newspaper, library tours, and brochures/posters were the most frequently reported activities used to publicize reference services offered.

8. Slightly less than half of the libraries kept records on the total number of questions asked, the number of reference questions asked, and the number of reference questions not answered. Less than 30% of the libraries kept records on the number of directional questions asked and the number of recurring reference questions.

9. The estimated average number of questions asked per week was 68.96. Of that weekly average, 64.1% were reference questions and 35.9% were directional. More than half of the

libraries (61.9%) estimated that an average of less than ten reference and ten directional questions were asked per week.

10. The subject categories of questions most frequently asked (hobbies/crafts, medical/health, geography/history, and consumer/self-help) did not correspond to those subject categories identified as most difficult to answer (scientific/technical, law/government, business/career, and arts/humanities).

11. The difficulty in answering questions in specific subject categories was most frequently attributed to the lack of needed reference materials, the question was too technical, lack of specialized reference staff, and lack of time. These corresponded to those factors identified as most likely to contribute to the improvement of reference service: additional reference materials, additional reference training, and additional hours of service.

12. The most frequently used means to handle reference questions that could not be answered were contacting another library or regional system, interlibrary loan, or directing patrons to another library. The non-library sources to which patrons were most frequently directed for reference questions that could not be answered were local individuals, government agencies and county extension services.

13. The five types of reference materials most frequently identified as being most essential were 1) encyclopedias, 2) almanacs, 3) geography/history materials,

4) periodical indexes, and 5) dictionaries.

14. Among the Iowa and Vavrek study findings that were compared, approximately half were correspondingly similar. The remaining half indicated that the averages and percentages of the Iowa study findings were consistently lower than those reported by Vavrek. These differences may be attributed to the potential effects of a) the significantly lower annual average budget of Iowa rural public libraries, b) the fact that the Iowa study sample consisted of proportionately fewer participants in the highest population range subset sample (1,000-2,499), and/or the diversities and contingencies fundamental to specific rural entities--communities, states, regions, and nations.

Limitations and Assumptions

Any conclusions or generalizations based on the findings of this study should be drawn only in consideration of the following assumptions and known limitations:

1. It is assumed that the findings, based on data produced from a 68.5% return of the sample, were representative of Iowa rural public libraries serving a population of less than 2,500.

2. Because some data corresponded proportionately to population served, the distribution of population range subsets within the sample may have affected the findings.

3. Because the questionnaire was self-administered,

the inherent constraints of respondent interpretation and question structure may have affected the resultant data.

4. The frequent request to respond to specified categories of data instead of providing open-ended questions may have inadvertently restricted the potential responses.

5. Complex or unclear questions may have increased the potential number of non-responses or unclear responses, which ultimately may have affected the findings.

6. Because of the differences unique to each rural community, the findings should not be interpreted as reflecting the characteristics and patterns of reference service in rural public libraries in other geographic areas.

Despite the inherent limitations, the design of this study, in the author's view, accomplished its purpose--to define the characteristics and patterns of reference service in Iowa rural public libraries. In retrospect, had time and funding permitted, personal interviews with a smaller sample of participants might have produced more accurate and more detailed data, and perhaps more clearly captured the essence and the reality of rural librarianship in Iowa.

Conclusions

Within the limitations discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Throughout this study no single determinant more consistently affected the ordered characteristics of rural

librarianship than community size. The perpetual cause and effect constraints of a limited population base and limited financial resources were profoundly expressed or implied in the responses to nearly every question. The number and level of training of staff members, hours of service, and the expressed desire or need for additional reference materials and additional reference training are all directly related to economics. Indirectly, but of no lesser importance, the types of services regularly offered, the frequency of being able to accommodate information needs with local resources, and the continued education of staff members also reflect the availability/unavailability of financial resources.

The fact that most Iowa rural librarians do not have a Master's degree in library science should come as no surprise considering the economic inability to attract or afford "trained" librarians. The fact that nearly half (43.8%) of all staff members participated in library conferences or workshops in 1983 indicates a strident effort toward professional growth despite the absence of financial incentive. For the other half of those staff members who did/do not participate in continuing education activities, the burden of training and assistance may rest, to an even greater degree, on regional and state consultants.

The strong reliance of Iowa rural public libraries on the regional systems was documented throughout the study. The economic reality of lessening that dependency is a formidable challenge. The potential for increasing local

tax support for libraries is governed by the fact that library service, with its universal benefits of learning, being informed, and improving life, must compete with the direct-benefit priorities of health, welfare, and public safety.[62] The reality and longevity of this fact implore proponents of rural libraries, whether staff members, board members, or concerned citizens, to aggressively market library services and the values they represent--not only to those community leaders who determine a library's economic fate, but to those who elect them as well.

Marketing effectively, however, depends upon a documented assessment of the community's characteristics and needs, and plans for effectively meeting those needs. In this study "an analysis of community needs" was ranked rather low among those factors that would most contribute toward improving reference service. Perhaps the more direct factors such as obtaining more reference materials or additional reference training seemed to be a more immediate and visible solution. Historically, community analysis has been infrequently implemented, based on the belief that one automatically knows a community simply by living and working in it, and believing that all small communities are about the same just as all large communities are about the same.[63] To dispel any such notions, the reader is referred to an extensive county-wide analysis aimed at improving individual and inaugurating cooperative library services in four Iowa communities with a population range of 314 to 1,846: Chicksaw County: Libraries and Communities: A Community Analysis in

Chicksaw County, Iowa.[64]

The critical role that regional and state support play in the survival of rural public libraries cannot be discounted. Likewise, the effectiveness of system efforts depend a great deal on the level of "self-help" and aspired improvement local libraries activate, individually and cooperatively.

> The everyday business of the local library demands that it be tied into the broader spectrum; but the survival of the library depends at the same time on the extent to which that library addresses its unique local constituency...The local library continues to provide the most meaningful access point, the human interface, which is the vital link in the communications process.[65]

The results of this study have confirmed the seemingly unsurmountable economic realities of rural librarianship. They have also more indirectly, perhaps, provided an insight into the level of commitment rural librarians have for providing the highest level of relevant service possible, utilizing to the fullest whatever human and material resources may be available or affordable--volunteers, local citizens, books from home or a 20' x 20' room in the Town Hall. The substantive efforts rural librarians are making on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of the "profession" are quite profound. The potential of those efforts is even more profound.

Where does the responsibility rest for identifying, recognizing and actualizing the potential of rural librarianship? In the author's view, it rests with the profession itself. The profession, with its historic proclivity toward espousing

the inadequacies of rural librarianship while sustaining a long-term inertia in studying and exploring its potential must attempt to more evenly distribute its priorities in proportion to the public that it serves. Concern must evolve from <u>understanding</u> rural.

> Librarians must understand the rural conditions, understand the penalties of isolation, observe the information seeking behavior of rural people, and be observed in the process of gaining this understanding.[66]

The following are suggested as further steps toward creating an understanding.

Suggestions for Further Study

In addition to indicating and confirming characteristics and patterns of reference service in rural public libraries, the findings of this study indicated also the magnitude of rural library phenomena yet to be investigated. Among many, the following might be considered:

1) What are the patterns and prevalence of establishing special collections in rural public libraries--special types, formats or subject areas? (The possibility of gaining bibliographic access to such "unknown" collections might be an added challenge.)
2) How prevalent are current interraction and cooperation among rural public libraries and other local community agencies? What are their successes and problems?
3) What are reference collection budget allocations and selection policies/procedures in rural public libraries? How current/extensive are reference collections? (This suggestion, credited to the director of one of the Iowa regional library systems, arrived too late for inclusion in this study.)

4) How do budget factors affect or effect library service priorities? How much do external forces contribute to decisions? How receptive to change and/or planning are community decision-makers? What are successful "political" avenues for increased funding?

5) How satisfied with current, available services are users of rural public libraries? What are their desires for improved or extended services? What are the consequences of satisfaction on service growth?

6) What library training activities/experiences would practicing rural librarians consider essential in preparing for the realities of rural librarianship? How might their experiences be applied to library school training programs?

7) How extensive or prevalent are current library school activities and courses that specifically address rural librarianship?

8) Are the programs and methods of preparing members of other professions who serve in rural communities, e.g., rural school teachers and extension agents relevant to the development of rural librarianship? Is there an opportunity for cooperative efforts in training as well as in the field? Can the concept of "itinerant" serve as a model for rural librarians?

9) How can the status and the career appeal of rural librarianship be raised within the profession? How can library school educators and practicing librarians mutually contribute to the actualization of rural priorities?

10) What specific diversities of "rural" most significantly affect the characteristics and patterns of rural librarianship--within a state, a region, or the nation?

Identifying and understanding the pluralism of rural librarianship will require more than individual or short-term efforts. The survival of rural librarianship will depend as much on the nurturing of its roots as on the cultivation of new growth. A persistence of active study and concerted effort will lead us to a greater understanding and recognition of its phenomena as well as its potential.

APPENDIX

TABLE 31

Specific Titles Most Frequently Cited Within Types/Subjects of Most Essential Reference Materials

(N=585)

Type/Subject	Frequency	Title *
1. Encyclopedias	147	(58) World Book Encyclopedia (11) Encyclopaedia Brittanica (9) Encyclopedia Americana (8) Book of Knowledge
2. Almanacs	61	(35) World Almanac and Book of Facts
3. Geography/history	49	(5) Lands and Peoples
4. Periodical indexes	44	(35) Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature (5) Abridged Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
5. Dictionaries	36	(15) a "Webster's"
6. Medical/health	31	(5) American Medical Association Family Medical Guide (4) Physician's Desk Reference
7. Local/state history	28	varied
8. Bibliographic resources	25	(17) Books in Print (3) card catalog
9. Biographies	25	(8) Webster's Biographical Dictionary (6) Current Biography
10. Periodicals	24	(11) National Geographic Magazine
11. Science	21	(5) New Book of Popular Science (3) Time-Life Science Library (3) Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia
12. Consumer/self-help	21	(4) Consumer Reports
13. Arts/crafts	17	varied
14. Government publications	12	(3) City, State codes (2) Iowa Official Register (2) "U.S. Bureau of the Census"
15. Other	44	varied

* Only most frequently cited titles are listed.

Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
410 David Kinley Hall
1407 W. Gregory Drive
Urbana, IL 61801

March 8, 1984

Dear Director:

I am a student at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As part of my graduate studies I am conducting a survey of the reference services of Iowa rural public libraries in cities with a population of 2500 or less. Your library was selected from The Iowa Public Library Statistics, 1981-82, published by the State Library of Iowa in 1983.

The purpose of this survey is to determine the characteristics of reference services offered in the majority of Iowa public libraries (76% of the total number of public libraries in Iowa are in cities with populations of 2500 or less). I am a native of Iowa and thus have a special interest in Iowa library service. The data produced by this survey will be compared to the results of a 1981 nationwide survey of reference services in rural public libraries conducted by Bernard Vavrek, Director of the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship at Clarion State College in Clarion, Pennsylvania. The completion of this study will, hopefully, provide insight and a greater awareness of the challenges and potential of rural librarianship in Iowa in particular, and nationally in general.

The questionnaire has been designed so that most questions can be answered with a check or a number. Some questions require a more detailed response. All information provided will be held in strict confidence and will be reported in a manner that will not identify individuals or libraries.

If a staff member other than the Director is responsible for reference service in your library, please route this questionnaire to him/her. The questionnaire may also be completed by staff consensus.

I will appreciate your taking a few minutes to complete and return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope on or before March 24, 1984.

I plan to make a copy of the final report available to the State Library of Iowa and to the Iowa Regional Library Systems.

If you have any questions please feel free to call me at (217) 367-4261. Thank you for your contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Sharon Eckert

Sharon Eckert
Graduate Student

Enclosures

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RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICES SURVEY

1. a. How many hours per week is the library open? . . . . . ____
   b. Of these hours, how many are week-end or evening hours?. . . . . ____

2. How much is the library's total budget for the current fiscal year?_____

3. Please complete those blanks appropriate for describing your staff.

	Paid Full-time	Paid Part-time	Volunteers
a. How many staff members are			
b. How many have achieved the following as their highest level of training?			
1. H.S. diploma.			
2. 2 yrs. college.			
3. Bachelor's.			
4. Master's in Library Science			
5. Other _____ (please specify)			
c. How many are responsible for providing reference service?			
d. How many participated in library conferences or workshops in 1983?. . . .			
e. How many are current members of:			
1. American Library Association.			
2. Iowa Library Association.			
f. Each category of staff members (Full-time, Part-time, Volunteers) has accumulated how many years of library experience?.			

4. a. Do you consider the following as reference service?

   b. How often does your library provide this service?

	Yes	No	Regularly R	Occasionally O	Never N
1. Assisting patrons in finding answers?.	___	___	___	___	___
2. Answering questions by telephone?.	___	___	___	___	___
3. Directing patrons to community resources?. . .	___	___	___	___	___
4. Assisting patrons in selecting materials?. . .	___	___	___	___	___
5. Giving individual library use instructions?	___	___	___	___	___
6. Preparing bibliographies for patrons?.	___	___	___	___	___

5. a. Does your library have a written policy statement on reference services offered? . . . . . Yes ___ No ___

b. If yes, what published standards or guidelines were used in the formulation of the policy?

_____

6. Which of the following does your library use to publicize reference services offered?

	Yes	No
a. speaking engagements.	___	___
b. programs/workshops.	___	___
c. library tours	___	___
d. newspaper	___	___
e. brochures/posters	___	___
f. newsletters	___	___
g. other _____ (please specify)	___	___

7. Which of the following reference service records does your library keep?

	Yes	No
a. Total number of questions asked?.	___	___
b. Number of directional questions (Questions which help locate things or describe the library, such as "Where are the encyclopedias?" or "What hours are you open?")	___	___
c. Number of reference questions (Questions which involve the use, interpretation or instruction in the use of information sources, such as "What is the population of Chicago?")	___	___
d. Recurring reference questions?.	___	___
e. Reference questions not answered?	___	___
f. Other _____ (please specify)	___	___

8. What is your best estimate of the average number of questions asked per week in 1983?

	In Library	By Telephone
a. Directional questions	_____	_____
b. Reference questions	_____	_____

9. The following identify categories of questions:

1. arts/humanities	6. law/government
2. business/career	7. medical/health
3. consumer/self-help	8. scientific/technical
4. geography/history	9. travel/recreational
5. hobbies/crafts	10. other _____ (please specify)

a. Of the categories of questions listed above, what are the 3 categories patrons most frequently ask? (Please indicate number code)

1. Most frequent. . . . . ___
2. 2nd most frequent. . . . . ___
3. 3rd most frequent. . . . . ___

b. Of the categories of questions listed above, what are the 3 categories you find most difficult to answer? (Please indicate number code)

1. Most difficult . . . . . ___
2. 2nd most difficult . . . . . ___
3. 3rd most difficult . . . . . ___

10. Please rank (1-5) the most frequent reasons why the categories of questions identified in Question 9.b. are most difficult to answer. (Most frequent = 1)

a. lack of specialized reference staff. . . . . ___
b. lack of needed reference materials . . . . . ___
c. lack of time . . . . . ___
d. question too technical . . . . . ___
e. other _____ ___
(please specify)

11. Please rank (1-6) the method your library most frequently uses to handle reference questions you cannot answer. (Most frequent = 1)

a. Direct patrons to another library. . . . . ___
b. Contact another library or regional library system . . . . . ___
c. Direct patrons to a source other than a library. . . . . ___
Please specify 2 most common sources:
1. _____
2. _____
d. Interlibrary loan. . . . . ___
e. No further action taken. . . . . ___
f. Other _____ ___
(please specify)

12. Please rank (1-7) the factors that would most contribute to improving reference service in your library. (Greatest contribution = 1)

a. additional hours of service . . . . . ___
b. additional staff. . . . . ___
c. additional reference training . . . . . ___
d. additional reference materials. . . . . ___
e. additional public relations . . . . . ___
f. analysis of community needs . . . . . ___
g. other _____ ___
(please specify)

13. What are the titles of the 5 reference materials you consider most essential in your library?

a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____
e. _____

14. What is your name? _____ Date _____
What is your position? _____ Tel.(___)_____

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire.

GLOSSARY

Definitions for the terms below are from the following sources and are identified accordingly:

1) Lynch, Mary Jo, ed. Library Data Collection Handbook (Chicago: American Library Association, 1981). (LCDH)

2) Young, Heartsill, ed. The ALA Glossary of Library and and Information Science (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983). (ALA)

. . . . . .

DIRECTIONAL TRANSACTION: An information contact which facilitates the use of the library in which the contact occurs, and its environs, and which may involve the use of sources describing the library, such as schedules, floor plans, handbooks, and policy statements. Examples of directional transactions are: 1) directions for locating facilities such as restrooms, carrels, and telephones; 2) directions for locating library staff and users; 3) directions for locating materials for which the user has a call number; 4) supplying materials such as paper and pencils; and 5) assisting users with the operation of machines. (LCDH: 142)

POLICY: An administrative plan or series of guidelines, preferably written, which delineate acceptable practices and actions for a wide range of activities within an organization. A library might have policies covering specific areas of activity, including circulation, information service, gifts, collection development, and cataloging, as well as system-wide policies in such areas as personnel. (ALA: 172)

PUBLIC LIBRARY PRIMARY SERVICE AREA: The geographic area, and the residents thereof, for which the library has been established to offer services and from which (or on behalf of which) the library derives income. Typically, this area would correspond to that from which the library derives its legal identity. (LDCH: 184)

REFERENCE SERVICE: (synonymous with information service) Personal assistance provided by members of the reference staff to library users in pursuit of information. (ALA: 118)

REFERENCE TRANSACTION: An information contact which involves the use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, or knowledge of such sources, by a member of the reference/information staff. Information sources include: 1) print and nonprint materials; 2) machine-readable data bases including bibliographic, full text, and numeric; 3) library bibliographic records, excluding circulation records; 4) other libraries and institutions; and 5) persons both inside and outside the library. (LDCH: 190)

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

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[5]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982-83 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), p. 3.

[6]Ibid., p. 20.

[7]Ibid., pp. 20, 649.

[8]Ibid., p. 647.

[9]Willits, Fern K., Robert C. Bealer, and Donald M. Crider, "Persistence of Rural/Urban Differences," in Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980s, ed. Don A. Dillman and Daryl J. Hobbs (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), p. 74.

[10]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982-83, p. 20.

[11]Ibid.

[12]U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population. Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population. Chapter C. General Social and Economic Characteristics. Part 17, Iowa. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 52.

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[22]Ibid., pp. 138-139.

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[32]Ibid., p. 3.

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[34]Ibid., pp. 2-32.

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[38]"Public Library Service in Iowa: Recommended Guidelines," pp. 9-13.

[39]Ibid., p. 9.

[40]Ibid., p. 12.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., p. 13.

[43]U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings 31 (January 1984): 220.

[44]"Public Library Service in Iowa: Recommended Guidelines," p. 11.

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[46]Ibid.

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[57]Eckard, Statistics of Public Libraries 1977-1978.

[58]Ibid., p. 127.

[59]Ibid., p. 114.

[60]Vavrek, Reference Service in Rural Public Libraries, p. 18.

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